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Article

# Saint Anselm of Canterbury and Charismatic Authority

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**Abstract:** The early career of Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) provides an opportunity to explore the operation of charismatic authority in a monastic setting. It is argued that the choice of Anselm for the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury in 1093 was the result of his growing reputation cultivated during his years as prior and abbot of the influential Norman monastery of Bec. The article explores various aspects of Anselm's charismatic authority including his performance of charisma, his academic charisma and reputation, and his reputation as a miracle-working holy man.

**Keywords:** charisma, Weber, Anselm, Canterbury, Eadmer, monasticism, medieval.

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## 1. Introduction/Background

The election of Anselm (c.1033-1109), abbot of the monastery of Bec in Normandy, to the archbishopric of Canterbury in the spring of 1093 was a violent affair ([1], pp. 49-71). According to contemporary sources, the majority of which were generated either by Anselm himself, or members of his entourage, or other later writers sympathetic to him, the abbot of Bec was in England on his monastery's business and had arrived at the royal court in Gloucester to find the king, William Rufus (ruled 1087-1100), son of William the Conqueror (ruled 1066-1087), dangerously ill. It was thought that the king was about to die and the members of his court advised him to make his peace with God by releasing all prisoners, remitting fines, and freeing those churches whose revenues he had kept in his own hands after their incumbents had died. Above all he was urged to appoint an archbishop to

Canterbury for, they said, '[t]he oppression of that Church is nothing less than the destruction of all Christianity in England, a thing most hateful' ([2], pp. 31-2]. Anselm was summoned to the king's bedside and he, too, counselled Rufus to prepare his soul for its encounter with the Almighty. Anselm received the king's confession and witnessed his promise that he would make amends for the wrongs he had committed. The promise was written out and verified with the king's seal. Rufus agreed to release prisoners, remit fines, pardon all offences, and provide his people with good and righteous laws. At this there was great jubilation and fervent prayers were offered for the recovery of 'so good, so great a king' ([2], p. 32). Finally, the king was urged to appoint an archbishop for Canterbury and he readily agreed to do so because, so he said, he had already been thinking of so doing. But who should be appointed? Rufus 'of his own accord' declared that the best man for the job was the abbot of Bec. At this Anselm 'turned deathly pale' with shock at the suggestion ([2], p. 32).

Anselm protested that he did not want the office and he tried to resist 'with all his might'. The bishops present took him to one side and remonstrated with him, pointing out that the English Church was in a state of crisis:

'You see,' they said, 'that all Christianity in England has nearly died out, all has fallen into confusion; abominations of every kind have arisen on all sides, that we ourselves and the Churches of God, which we should rule have fallen into peril of eternal death through the tyranny of this man and do you then, when you could help, not deign to do so? What are you thinking of, you extraordinary man? Where are your wits to? The Church of Canterbury, whose oppression is the oppression and ruin of us all, calls you, in her troubles implores you, to be her deliverer and ours; and do you, with little regard for her liberty, little regard too for our deliverance, refuse to share the labours of your brethren and care only for your own selfish ease and repose?'

Anselm admitted that there were indeed grave problems, but he pleaded that he was old and 'unfit for worldly work' ([2], pp. 32-3; [3], pp. 33-4). The abbot of Bec argued vehemently that he should not be appointed to Canterbury until the bishops dragged him to the king's beside. Rufus, almost in tears, pleaded with Anselm to remember the friendship he had shown towards his parents and not let him die still holding the archbishopric of Canterbury for fear that this would condemn his soul to torment. Still Anselm refused. Those present became angry and accused him of abandoning a dying man and condemning England to future oppressions. Turning to two of his followers, the monks Baldwin and Eustace, Anselm asked their advice. In tears, Baldwin answered that if it was the will of God, Anselm should obey and at that moment Baldwin's nose began to bleed ([2], pp. 33-4). The king instructed them to kneel at Anselm's feet in a gesture of supplication, but Anselm also kneeled down and still refused. Finally, the crowd shouted for the pastoral staff to be brought and they bent back Anselm's fingers when he closed his fist to resist their attempts to force it into his hands. The bishops held the staff against his fist and then he was carried off into the neighbouring church still loudly protesting his objections. He cried out:

'Do you realize what you are trying so hard to do? You are trying to harness together at the plough under one yoke an untamed bull and an old and feeble sheep. And what will come of it?

Why, without doubt the untameable fury of the bull will drag the sheep, which should produce wool and milk and lambs, this way and that through the thorns and the briars; and the bull, if it do not shake itself of the yoke altogether, will so tear the sheep that the sheep, unable to furnish any of these good things, will be of no use either to itself or anyone else. How so? You have thoughtlessly mated the sheep with the bull.' ([2], p. 35; [3], pp. 35-6).

Anselm continued the metaphor to explain that the Church in England was a plough and that it should be pulled along by two oxen, namely the king and the archbishop of Canterbury, the one drawing the plough along by his human justice and sovereignty, the other by divine doctrine and authority ([5], pp. 29-45). What Anselm feared was that the young king would crush him and make the situation worse ([2], p.36).

Anselm's dramatic 'election' as archbishop of Canterbury in 1093 marked the beginning of his turbulent relationships with successive kings of England, William Rufus and his younger brother Henry I (ruled 1100-1135), ([1], pp. 73-99; 125-66). In each case, Anselm felt obliged to go into exile, thereby abandoning his church to the depredations of the royal officers. Anselm's election has been the subject of much debate and, from the late eleventh century onwards, questions have been raised as to the sincerity of Anselm's opposition to his appointment. Soon after his elevation to the archdiocese of Canterbury, he felt it necessary to write to the monks of Bec giving his version of events as there were evidently rumours circulating that he had, in fact, wished for the appointment to the archiepiscopal see ([4], vol. II, No. 148, pp. 7-11). An examination of Anselm's career from his birth around 1033 in Aosta, now in Northern Italy, to the dramatic events of his election in April 1093, provides an opportunity to explore Anselm's rise to prominence and whether using Weber's model of charismatic authority can throw any new light on these events. Anselm's monastic career also raises questions about the place of charisma in the monastery and whether it was an essential component of abbatial authority. Given Anselm's fame as an intellectual by 1093, the notion of academic charisma, understood in this context as the social capital and influence he derived from his reputation as a teacher, theologian and philosopher, might also be relevant here ([6], pp. 3-30). It is worth noting at the outset that the medieval sources for Anselm's life and career display a certain bias in his favour. The conventions of medieval hagiography have influenced and continue to influence representations of Archbishop Anselm ([17])). These issues concerning the sources for a study of Anselm are addressed below.

## 2. Anselm and Charisma

By the spring of 1093, Abbot Anselm of Bec thus enjoyed a considerable reputation. Since 1078 he had been the abbot of Bec, arguably the most influential monastery in Normandy ([1], pp. 23-48). He had served as prior under the monastery's founder, the charismatic Abbot Herluin, before being elected unanimously by the monks of Bec as abbot ([7], pp.15-25). When Anselm entered the monastery its affairs were in the hands of another influential figure, Prior Lanfranc, who later served as abbot of the Conqueror's abbey of Saint-Étienne, Caen, before being appointed, in 1070, to the

archdiocese of Canterbury ([8], pp. 11-74). Lanfranc was also a man of European reputation and his pontificate at Canterbury witnessed a period of considerable change in the post-Conquest English Church ([8], pp. 78-174). Lanfranc was Anselm's mentor, or perhaps it is more appropriate to say that Anselm was Lanfranc's disciple or follower. Even after his departure for Caen and Canterbury, Lanfranc exercised considerable influence over Anselm ([8], pp. 21-2, 150-1, 175-6, 180-1, 208-13). Abbot Herluin and Prior Lanfranc presented Anselm with charismatic models to emulate as he embarked on his monastic career.

The aim of this paper is to explore whether Anselm possessed the kind of charismatic authority that Weber envisaged. Anselm's modern biographer, R.W. Southern, referred to the 'remarkable hold that he [Anselm] had on the affection of violent and aggressive magnates', and to his 'extraordinary power of winning the love of people of all kinds', but the word 'charisma' is not indexed in his study ([9], pp. 182, 184). As Weber originally borrowed the term from religious - indeed monastic - history and the work of Rudolf Sohm, it seems appropriate to apply it to the career of one of the most prominent ecclesiastical figures of the eleventh century ([21], p. 328; [10], p.764 and n.3; [13], pp. 185-97). Can the concepts of charisma and charismatic authority assist the historian in an analysis of Anselm's rise to prominence, and his role as abbot of Bec, as well as providing another perspective on the circumstances of his appointment to Canterbury? Anselm's individual, personal charisma preceded his election to a series of offices within the monastery at Bec, before assuring that he was considered for the vacant archiepiscopal chair at Canterbury. It will be argued that the sources, tinged as they are with shades of hagiographical convention, do indeed indicate that Anselm exhibited the traits of charismatic authority, but that this operated in conjunction with other forms of authority found in medieval monastic communities. It will also be suggested that Anselm was careful to cultivate a public image or reputation, partly based on his devotional, theological and philosophical writings, and partly on his status as abbot of Bec, which enabled him to make the most of those divine *charismata* or gifts with which his followers believed he was endowed. In this respect, the appointment to Canterbury may be seen as the culmination of a process of honing those gifts and it cannot be said, *pace* Weber, that, like other charismatic leaders, he sprang from nowhere to defy traditional authority through offering charismatic leadership. However, it is necessary to begin by considering the nature of the main sources for such a study.

### 3. Biographer and subject: Eadmer of Canterbury and Anselm of Bec

The main sources for Anselm's career are Anselm's own writings, especially his collected letters, and the accounts compiled by his disciple, Eadmer, monk of Canterbury, which contain a great deal of information derived from Anselm himself. Eadmer was perhaps thirty years Anselm's junior and he first met his hero in 1079. Eadmer was probably from a Kentish family and was born around 1060 ([9], pp. 402-21; [11], pp. 229-40; [12], pp. xiii-xxxv). He tells us that he was brought up in the monastery of Christ Church Canterbury, which suggests that he entered the monastery as an oblate, that is as child to be educated in the monastic life. In his writings, Eadmer refers to events he witnessed in the pontificate of Archbishop Lanfranc (1070 to 1089), but it was the meeting with Anselm and their subsequent relationship which had the most profound effect on his career ([14], I. xxix, pp. 48-50).

Eadmer produced two linked accounts of Anselm's career based on notes he had been compiling during his time with the archbishop ([14], [2]). Anselm asked to see the notes and, at first, corrected and rearranged the materials he was given. A little afterwards Anselm changed his mind and, arguing that he was not worthy of a literary memorial, ordered Eadmer to destroy the writings. Eadmer obeyed his master's command but also managed to preserve the material by perpetrating an act of pious disobedience. 'So I observed the letter of his command,' he tells us, 'and destroyed those quires, having first copied their contents onto other quires. Perhaps my action was not free from the sin of disobedience, for I carried out his order otherwise that I knew that he intended' ([14], II. lxxii, pp. 150-1). The first version of the *Vita S. Anselmi* has been dated to between 1112 and 1114 ([12], p. xxiii). Its companion, Eadmer's *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, it has been argued, originally ended with Anselm's death in 1109, but he added further material ([12], pp. xxiii-ix). These two works form the basis for any study of Anselm's life, but, as has been noted, they can be supplemented by his letter collection and other contemporary accounts of his career.

Eadmer's view of Anselm is that of a disciple and biographer and this should be borne in mind when assessing the evidence presented here. Biographers run the risk of identifying themselves too closely with the concerns of their subjects and falling into the temptation of defending their actions at every turn. Eadmer was also a hagiographer and his expectations of the holy men he wrote about may have coloured his portrayal of Anselm and enhanced his sense of his subject's charisma ([12], pp. xiii-xxxv; [17], pp. 38-71). As a fellow monk, younger contemporary, and disciple, Eadmer shared almost the same normative and moral outlook as his subject, namely that of the *Rule of St Benedict* ([18]). It might be assumed that he understood Anselm in ways that the modern historian cannot, no matter how much empathic sensibility is brought to the study. Weber himself wondered whether it was possible to write about religious experience in rational terms at all ([15], p.233; [16], p. 23; [19], pp. 1-30). There are signs, however, that Eadmer was not an unquestioning devotee of Anselm and the story of his pious disobedience suggests that he had the self-confidence to defy his hero.

#### 4. Anselm encounters monastic charisma

The account of Anselm's monastic conversion provides a revealing insight into the level of his ambition. Eadmer, presumably drawing on the archbishop's own recollections, tells us that Anselm left his home in Aosta (Northern Italy) after he and his father fell out.<sup>1</sup> It is clearly implied that the death of Anselm's mother, Ermenburga, was associated with this rift. Without her, Eadmer tells us, Anselm felt as though 'the ship of his heart had lost its anchor' ([14], I. iv, p. 6). Without her influence he may have succumbed to those worldly temptations that her presence had always dissuaded him from indulging in. Anselm headed north across the Alps and eventually arrived at Bec, drawn there by the fame of its prior, Lanfranc ([14], I. v, pp. 8-10; [8], pp. 15-24). Anselm recognised Lanfranc's 'outstanding wisdom, which shone forth in him' and he placed himself under his guidance ([14], I. v, p. 8). In other words, Anselm fell under Lanfranc's charismatic spell and became one of his followers. We are told that 'Anselm's devotion to Lanfranc was so great, and his belief in the value of Lanfranc's advice so

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Weber too had an argument with his father after which he never saw him again. News of his father's death seems to have triggered a mental breakdown, ([16], p. 14). For the suggestion that personal trauma is a source of charismatic motivation, see [20].

strong, that if, while they were going to Rouen through the great wood which lies above Bec, Lanfranc had said to him "Stay in this wood and see that you never come out so long as you live", without a doubt, as he used to say, he would have obeyed that command' ([14], I. vi, p. 11). It is no surprise to learn that Anselm looked to Lanfranc for guidance as to the future path his life should take. In a revealing passage Eadmer tells us that Anselm contemplated taking monastic vows at Bec or at the famous and very influential Burgundian abbey of Cluny. However, he hesitated because he feared that he would either be overshadowed by Lanfranc's brilliance at Bec, or that the rigorous nature of life at Cluny would also condemn him to fruitlessness or insignificance. Anselm confessed to Eadmer that he recognised how shallow this made him appear, and added in his defence that 'I was not yet tamed, and there was not yet in me any strong contempt of the world' ([14], I. v, p. 9). Anselm's youthful ambition is revealing here and it was only with hindsight did he understand how self-serving it appeared. Anselm was fearful of living in obscurity, his own light outshone by the personal charisma of Lanfranc on the one hand or pushed into the shadows by the collective charisma of the monks of Cluny on the other. He was looking, so he told Eadmer, for somewhere to display his knowledge and be of service to others. Here, Anselm seems to have articulated a sense of mission, which consisted of an uneasy combination of the desire for self-promotion and the call to serve others ([14], I. v, p. 9). Anselm's later embarrassment at this episode suggests that it was the fear of reputational obscurity rather than the missed opportunity to serve others that so exercised him. This combination of self-promotion and the desire to serve others so that they might benefit from the charismatic's personal gifts might be seen as typical of these leaders. A charismatic leader needs followers and so obscurity was not an option for Anselm. The trope of service to others is reflected in the use of the formula *servus servorum Dei* ('servant of the servants of God') used by heads of medieval monastic houses, the papacy, and, indeed, by Anselm as abbot of Bec (e.g. [4], I, No. 101, pp. 252-55).

Once he had decided, with the help of Lanfranc and Archbishop Maurilius of Rouen (1055-67), to become a monk at Bec, Anselm, then aged twenty-seven, set his mind to emulating the more religious of the monks ([14], I, vii, pp. 11-13). So successful was he that he became the very pattern of the monastic life. For three years Anselm practised his monastic vocation assiduously and, Eadmer reported, he was rewarded with the gift of insight concerning the divinity of God. One night he was so fixed on trying to understand how it was that the prophets of old 'could see both past and future as if they were present', that he seemed to acquire the ability to see through the solid walls of the church and dormitory and watch his fellow monks preparing for matins ([14], I. vii, pp. 12-13). This extraordinary faculty was the mark of the charismatic and it must be assumed that reports of Anselm's divine gifts became the subject of whispered conversation in Bec's cloister and perhaps rumours circulating beyond the monastery walls. Recognition of Anselm's personal *charismata* played a role in his elevation as prior on Lanfranc's departure for Caen in 1063 and then, on the death of Herluin in 1078, as abbot ([14], I, p. 12; I. xxvi, p. 44).

Abbot Herluin was Bec's charismatic figurehead and as he grew older he relied more and more on Anselm for the day to day running of his monastery ([23], [24]). In this respect, Anselm might be seen as an agent of the process Weber identified as the 'routinization of charisma' ([21], pp. 363-66). In order to deal with the necessary and mundane operations of the monastery some of Herluin's personal



charismatic authority had to be ceded to more traditional and legal forms of domination ([22], pp. 287-88). Herluin's deputy, the prior, ensured that discipline was maintained in the monastic community and that the everyday needs of its members were met. This raises the question of the other kinds of authority functioning within the monastery. The dominant normative monastic text in the Medieval West was the *Rule of St Benedict*. The *Rule* assumed that the monks would obey their abbot, whose authority was derived from his office ([18], c. 5, pp. 14-15). This would seem to align with Weber's characterisation of 'rational-legal' authority in which official functions are bound by rules, or, in this case *the Rule* ([22], p. 330). That is not to say that charismatic authority might not enhance the authority derived from their office exercised by those in positions of power within the medieval monastery. The abbot was also given advice on how to fulfil his role and it is instructive to compare the record of Anselm's actions with these guide-lines ([18], c. 2, pp. 6-9).

According to his biographer, Anselm demonstrated a talent for empathy so that he 'understood the characters of people of whatever age or sex'. It was claimed that he had the ability to open up the secrets of their hearts and to expose their propensity for virtue or vice. There was no doubt that 'the spirit of counsel ruled in his heart' ([14], I. viii, pp. 13-15; cf. [18], pp. 6-9). As well as this aspect of his charisma, Anselm began to perform the bodily discipline expected of a holy man ([14], I. viii, pp. 14-15). Anselm's charismatic authority was to some extent dependent on this performativity, an aspect that is explored further below. The medieval church understood the power of outward manifestations of inner spirituality and the monks of Bec seem to have been especially adept in the use of holy tears and Anselm wept along with the best of them ([25]). The sincerity of his compunction was demonstrated again and again by the copious tears he shed. Anselm's bodily comportment and the sheer emotional content of his spirituality enhanced his charismatic authority. This was necessary for Anselm had enemies within the monastery. Eadmer described the extent of the problem:

...some of the brethren of the monastery were his enemies, being envious at seeing him, whom in seniority of profession they judged ought to have come after him, preferred before them. Being thus upset, they upset others; they spread scandal, they made dissensions, they formed cliques and fostered hatreds ([14], I. ix, pp. 15-16).

If his exemplary life was not sufficient to prompt his opponents to emulate him, Anselm's solution was to find a way to reach his enemies. Here we are introduced to the 'holy guile' through which he brought his opponents round to his will. Eadmer gives the example of the monk Osbern who Anselm trained to love him. The technique described involved at first flattering the young monk and indulging his boyish pranks, and then, after winning his trust, gradually refashioning his outlook by withdrawing the indulgences and bringing him round to conformity. That refashioning might involve corporal punishment as well as verbal admonishment. Anselm's programme had the desired effect and Osbern the rebellious monk became one of his prior's most devoted followers ([14], I. x, pp. 16-20). The ability of the charismatic leader to inspire love in his followers seems to be demonstrated in Anselm's reconfiguration of the emotions of the young monk Osbern. The application of this 'holy guile' also suggests parallels with the techniques of more modern charismatic leaders such as Jim Jones, the leader of the Peoples' Temple ([26], pp. 137-55).

Anselm's educational techniques have been the subject of recent investigation by Sally Vaughn ([27]). Part of Anselm's success was due to his ability to reach his followers through the use of effective rhetorical techniques. He was a master of the apt metaphor as his explanation of why he focused his attention on adolescents and youths makes clear.<sup>2</sup> Drawing his metaphor from the practice of sealing documents with wax, he noted that it was difficult to make an impression on the hardened wax of old men 'sunk in the vanity of the world'. Similarly, the molten wax of the very young, who are unable to distinguish between good and evil, will not hold an impression. Only the wax of the adolescent, lying as it does between these extremes will hold the impression one gives it. 'If you teach him, you can shape him as you wish' ([14], I. xi, pp. 20-1).

In dealing with opposition within the monastery, Anselm was able to draw on the institutional charismatic authority of his position as prior which, in a monastery such as Bec headed by a charismatic, but administratively passive abbot like Herluin, gave him considerable power. In this respect he emulated the position of his predecessor, Lanfranc, and, as has been noted, embodied that routinization of charisma that Weber envisaged as the inevitable development of charismatic authority. By the time he left Bec in 1092 to come to England, he was accustomed to his personal charisma being reinforced by the institutional charisma and authority of the office he held.

Eadmer suggests that long before his elevation to Canterbury, Anselm, then still in Normandy, found the burdens of office wearisome and tearfully petitioned Archbishop Maurilius of Rouen that he might be relieved of his duties. The archbishop refused to countenance the request and Anselm was ordered to retain the office of prior unless his abbot decreed otherwise. In what might be a later addition or interpretation of this exchange, Eadmer wrote that Maurilius predicted that Anselm would not long remain in his current post, but would be elevated to a higher office ([14], I. xii, pp. 21-2). Part of Anselm's reported reluctance to continue as prior may have stemmed from a desire to continue his theological and philosophical writing unhindered. Anselm's growing reputation in the period before his election to the see of Canterbury was in no small measure due to the charisma derived from his reputation as a scholar, which provided an added source of authority.

## 5. Anselm's scholarly charisma

By the time of his election as archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm had established a reputation as a theologian and philosopher.<sup>3</sup> As well as early writings *On Truth*, *On the Freedom of the Will* and *On the Fall of the Devil*, he developed a preoccupation with the nature of God which he explored in two influential works. In his famous text the *Monologion* completed before 1077, his methodology departed from the usual path of monastic intellectual enquiry in that he 'put aside all authority of Holy Scripture [and] enquired into and discovered *by reason alone* what God is, and proved by invincible reason that God's nature is what the true faith holds it to be, and that it could not be other than it is' ([14], I. xix, pp. 28-31; [29]; [30]). As described by Eadmer, Anselm became obsessed with this work and could think of nothing else. Just as he began to worry that his preoccupation might be a trick of the

<sup>2</sup> Vita, I.xi

<sup>3</sup> There is a considerable literature on Anselm's theological and philosophical works, see for example, [28]. These works are also the main focus of Southern's study [9].

Devil, he experienced a moment of clarity and quickly committed his thoughts to wax tablets. In the context of this discussion of Anselm's charisma, it is significant that Eadmer reports this revelation in the following manner:

The suddenly one night during matins the grace of God illuminated his heart, the whole matter became clear to his mind, and a great joy and exultation filled his inmost being ([14], I. xix, p. 30).

Anselm's understanding was a gift from God in the original, Pauline, sense of the Apostolic *charismata* ([31], pp. 23-50).

Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God has since become famous, but his method challenged accepted practice and prompted misgivings in his mentor, Lanfranc, whose approval of an early version of the text was, as one of Anselm's modern biographers put it, 'less than lukewarm' ([14], I. xix, p.29, n. 2; cf. [4], I, No. 72, pp. 197-98). Despite his protestations that he would do nothing with the work unless it met with Lanfranc's approval, Anselm persevered with it and, together with the *Proslogion*, it became a major component of his reputation as a scholar. There is an interesting story preserved by Eadmer that the wax tablets used by Anselm were 'lost' and it might be the case that the monk into whose charge he committed them for safe-keeping found their contents disturbing. Another set of wax tablets were found broken the next morning ([14], I. xix, pp. 30-1). The self-confidence needed to challenge accepted practice in theological matters suggests that Anselm possessed the charismatic confidence, or arrogance, to challenge tradition, a trait identified by Weber as characteristic of the charismatic leader. Anselm was lauded and he was invited to preach to clergy and laity alike. He was the guest of honour in monastic houses and the residences of the aristocracy, both in Normandy, England and beyond ([14], I. xxii, pp. 39-40). He talked with everyone, great and small, and even set aside time to a mere youth of about nineteen (Eadmer), who would later become his biographer ([14], I. xxix, pp. 48-50; I. xxxi, pp. 54-57).

## 6. Signs and wonders

Anselm's reputation did not rest on his intellectual achievements alone. His charismatic authority was also strengthened through the working of miracles. As a boy, he had reported to all who would listen that he had had a vision in which he was fed with the pure white bread of Heaven ([14], I. ii, pp. 4-5). Later, as well as that ability to see through walls reported above, Anselm was credited with wonder-working gifts. Eadmer tells us that Anselm was able to cure with a look a youth troubled with pain in his genitalia, and was able to drive off the wolves, which a gravely ill monk imagined were attacking him ([14], I. xiv, pp. 23-4; I. xv, pp. 24-5).<sup>4</sup> In the latter episode the invalid claimed that when Anselm 'came in the door and raised his hand to make the sign of the cross, he saw a tongue of flame come out of his mouth as if it were a lance hurled at the wolves' ([14], I. xv, p. 25). The motif of the divine fire was repeated in the story of the monk Riculfus who claimed to have seen Anselm at prayer in the midst of a ball of fire ([14], I. xvi, pp.25-6).<sup>5</sup> More mundane wonders were performed by

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<sup>4</sup> Vita, I.xiv, xv

<sup>5</sup> Vita, I.xvi

Anselm when he provided food for his companions ([14], I. xvii, pp. 26-7; I. xviii, pp. 27-8).<sup>6</sup> In these cases Anselm demonstrated that he was 'inspired by the spirit of prophecy' ([14], I. xviii, p. 28). Further evidence of Anselm's visionary gift was reported by Eadmer. During an illness, Anselm was 'caught up in the spirit of ecstasy' and was shown a raging torrent into which all the filth of the world flowed. The river sucked in men and women of all status and he was shocked to discover that they drank the filthy water and positively revelled in their fate. Anselm's spirit guide allowed him to view the true monastic vocation symbolised by a shining silver cloister with silvery grass underfoot. Eadmer assures his reader that Anselm understood that only the true monastic life was for him and he committed himself thenceforth to it. Interestingly, Eadmer tells us that Anselm was also committed to understanding the rational basis for the monastic life and communicating that to others ([14], I. xxi, pp. 35-6).

As portrayed by his biographer, Anselm was a miracle worker and Eadmer assures his readers that he might have included many more accounts of cures effected through the water in which Anselm had washed his hands and the morsels of food that had been secretly removed from his plate ([14], I. xxxv, pp. 61-2). Anselm's reputation for sanctity, his *fama sanctitatis*, enhanced his charismatic appeal and drew crowds of the laity as well as members of the Church in search of his help ([14], I. xxxii, pp. 57-59).

## 7. Anselm and the economics of charisma

Anselm, like many others identified as medieval charismatics, rejected the personal use of money. As a Benedictine monk he was vowed to poverty, but, it must be remembered, many monastic houses were among the wealthiest institutions in medieval society and those in positions of responsibility perforce had to deal with the acquisition and disbursement of money and the pressures of commercial transactions. However, it is argued that one of the ways that a charismatic leader obtained legitimate authority was to reject attachment to mundane routines. In this respect the tenets of medieval monasticism would seem to have provided the perfect foundation for such a leader. In a sense he was able to draw on the collective charisma of the monastic order itself. This collective charisma already marked out its adherents as standing outside the routine expectations of everyday life. One of the paradoxes of medieval monasticism, especially relating to new or reformed monastic orders, was that the very espousal of Apostolic poverty attracted wealth in the form of pious donation ([14], I. xxii, pp. 39-40). Patrons recognised that this purer form of monasticism was preferred as more efficacious for the soul's welfare. Thus, reconciling the financial success of a monastery with its spiritual mission became a problem for monastic authorities.

Anselm was careful to ensure that none of Bec's resources were seen to be his private property. Eadmer's text is interesting here because, at the same time that he assures us that Anselm ensured that resources that had been assigned for his use during journeys made on the abbey's business were to be put at the disposal of anyone making such a journey: he 'never held back from supplying the necessities of others from his own store' ([14], I. xxiii, p. 40). Great sums of gold and silver were offered to Anselm, but he made sure that they were given to the abbot and monks. Eadmer suggested

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<sup>6</sup> Vita, I. xvii, xviii

that this may have lost Bec some revenues as one donor made it clear that the gifts were for Anselm alone ([14], I. xxiii, p. 41). There is a hint in Eadmer's text that Anselm's professed abhorrence of wealth might not have been universally believed. In describing Anselm's preaching tours, Eadmer reported the story of the knight Cadulus who wanted to take up the monastic life. He was intercepted by the devil on his way to meet Anselm and asked why he wanted to see that 'hypocrite prior. Certainly his reputation is at variance with his manner of life...For this hypocrisy has already deceived many and, having buttered them up with vain hopes, has stripped them and left them destitute' ([14], I. xxv, p. 43). It may be significant that Anselm helped Cadulus find his monastic vocation, but persuaded him to become a monk at Marmoutier:

For it was Anselm's custom, notwithstanding any hope of advantage, never to persuade anyone who wished to renounce the world, to do so at his own monastery rather than elsewhere. And the consideration which led him to act thus was as follows: if anyone entered the monastery except as a result of his own deliberation, and then - as might happen - found it irksome and began to disparage it, he might attribute his own scandalized and impatient grumbling to Anselm's persuasion, and so make serious divisions between him and the others ([14], I. xxv, p. 43).

This might be seen as ensuring the continued harmony of the abbey under Anselm's control, but it might also be viewed as an attempt to minimize the potential for damage to Anselm's reputation, should the monastic recruit prove less than satisfactory.

## 8. Performing charisma

It has been observed that charisma demands an audience and it is thus important to recognise the performative aspect of charismatic authority ([10], pp. 767-8). The rituals and ceremonies that were expressive of, and constitutive of, medieval monasticism allowed those occupying positions in the monastic hierarchy to demonstrate their authority. Their words and actions were, in this respect, naturally the focus of the attention of their subordinates. If that attention wandered, there were officers empowered to remind the monks of their duty to pay attention. An aspect of Anselm's performance of authority was his ability to focus attention on himself through silence and inactivity. A passage in the *Life of St Anselm* describes his management of the secular affairs of the monastery of Bec. Eadmer pictures Anselm, by then abbot of the monastery, delegating most of the mundane business. Whenever he was called to attend judicial assemblies, he adopted surprising tactics:

...when he was in a crowd of litigants and his opponents were laying their heads together, discussing the crafts and wiles by which they could help their own case and fraudulently injure his, he would have nothing to do with such things; instead, he would discourse to those who would listen about the Gospels or some other part of the Bible, or at least about some subject tending to edification. And often, if there was no-one to listen to such talk, he would compose himself, in the sweet quietness of a pure heart, to sleep. Then sometimes, when the frauds which had been prepared with intricate subtlety were brought to his notice he would immediately detect and disentangle

them, not like a man who had just been sleeping, but like one who had been wide-awake, keeping a sharp watch ([14], I. xxvii, p. 46).

Anselm feigned indifference to the proceedings and this charismatic hauteur enabled him to catch his litigious opponents off-guard. This was a tactic that he was to employ later during his difficulties with the king ([2], pp. 58). This suggests the charismatic leader's confidence in his own judgement and his willingness to flout convention and challenge tradition. Whether Anselm was asleep or not, his followers and those who found themselves faced with this sleeping monk in court evidently noticed this singular display and were presumably disconcerted by it (Cf. [32], pp. 51-5).

When he was unanimously elected as Herluin's successor as abbot, Anselm resisted the appointment with all his might. After reasoned argument failed, Anselm resorted to physical displays of supplication. Demonstrative bodily comportment was utilised in an attempt to appeal to the emotions of the monks of Bec. He threw himself down at their feet and with 'tears and pitiable sobs he begged and prayed, in the name of Almighty God, that if they had any bowels of mercy in them, they would act towards him with the mercy of God before their eyes, abandoning their attempt and allowing him to remain free of so great a burden.' However, the monks were equally versed in such rituals and similarly skilled in demonstrations of this sort. They, too, prostrated themselves 'and begged him to have mercy on the monastery and on themselves rather than on himself, lest putting aside the common good he should be convicted of loving himself alone before all others.' Eventually Anselm was instructed by Archbishop Maurilius of Rouen to accept the burden of office ([14], I. xxvi, pp. 44-5). The parallels with Anselm's election to the see of Canterbury are instructive and when that later episode is borne in mind, Eadmer's comment that 'such then was the violence with which he was made abbot' takes on something of a critical note ([14], I. xxvi, p. 45). There is a similar ironic twist in a letter from Abbot Fulk of Saint Pierre-sur-Dives to Anselm. Abbot Fulk quoted verbatim from a letter which Anselm had sent him on his election to the abbacy, reminding him of his duty to accept the burden of office ([4], I, No. 88, pp. 227-28). Was there a wry smile on Fulk's face as he dictated his letter of encouragement to Anselm?

## 9. Charisma and fame: Anselm in England

Anselm's fame preceded him when he made his first visit to England in 1079, the year of his consecration as abbot of Bec. It is at this point in the *Vita Anselmi* that its author, Eadmer, moves from being mere biographer to eye-witness and participant in events. 'It was at this time,' he tell us, 'that I too was found worthy to come to the notice of his holiness and, considering my insignificance – for I was only a youth – I enjoyed no small share of the blessing of his friendship.' The fact that Eadmer was a youth was probably important as we have seen how Anselm paid special attention to the education of young men. Biographers occasionally find it difficult not to enhance their own standing by associating themselves with the virtues of their subjects. It is thus significant that Eadmer added this autobiographical note just after telling his readers that Anselm was in the habit of talking privately with the more intelligent monks of Christ Church, Canterbury ([14], I. xxix, p. 50).

One of the main reasons for Anselm's visit to England was to inspect the estates of the abbey of Bec. On his travels, Anselm was a guest in many communities of monks, nuns and canons, as well as

receiving the hospitality of certain noblemen. According to Eadmer, Anselm was cheerful and approachable, with the result that:

...the hearts of all, being wonderfully moved to love him, were seized with a ravenous hunger to hear his words. For he adapted his words to every class of men, so that his hearers declared that nothing could have been spoken that was more appropriate to their station. He spoke to monks, to clerks, and to laymen, ordering his words to the way of life of each.

Therefore the attraction of Anselm's sermons was that he preached *ad status* that is to the particular interests of his audience, winning them over as followers. His rhetorical skills and the force of his performance must have been considerable, as well as his ability to connect emotionally with his audience. His style, Eadmer suggests, departed from the usual:

And when we say that he admonished or instructed or taught these things, he did it not as others are wont to teach, but far differently; he set forth each point with familiar examples in daily life, supporting them with evidence of solid reason, and leaving them in the minds of his hearers, stripped of all ambiguity. Everyone therefore who could enjoy his conversation was glad to do so, for on any subject they wished he had heavenly counsel ready for them. Hence men and women of every age admired and loved him, and the more powerful and distinguished they were the more anxious and ready they were to serve him ([14], I. xxxi, p. 55).

Anselm's preaching was evidently directed at the interests of the different ranks of his audience, a technique known as *ad status* preaching (e.g. [33]). Such was Anselm's appeal that the most prominent in secular society were also won over. Even the powerful king, William the Conqueror, a man with charisma of his own, who appeared intimidating, 'nevertheless unbent and was amiable with Anselm, so that to everyone's surprise he seemed an altogether different man when Anselm was present' ([14], I. xxxi, p. 56). The abbot of Bec, according to his biographer, made a considerable impact on England and the Normans who had settled there. 'The good report of Anselm thus became known in every part of England and he was beloved by everyone as a man to be revered for his sanctity' ([14], I. xxxi, p. 57). Fame adheres to the charismatic leader and might be judged an essential attribute given the leader's need for devoted followers. The distinction between Weberian and popular charisma has been recognised, but here it is difficult to separate the concepts ([10], pp. 764-65). Did Anselm's sermons entertain as well as provide spiritual food for his audience? Could the people Eadmer writes about have been 'fans' of Anselm's preaching instead of, or as well as, followers of the man himself? Could they understand his words, or was his delivery, his performance, of sufficient strength to render the ability to understand his words irrelevant? Whether Anselm ever made use of the 'techniques of frenzy' is doubtful ([26], pp. 102-106), but whatever the answer to these questions, Anselm's reputation was assured and when the English Church faced a crisis during the reign of the Conqueror's successor, it was to the famously holy abbot of Bec that the people and clergy turned for help.

## 10. Conclusions: Failed charisma

After a decade or more since his last visit, Anselm returned to England in September 1092. Several reasons are cited for his arrival: Hugh of Avranches, earl of Chester and many other noblemen of England had chosen Anselm as their spiritual physician and protector. He also had duties connected with Bec's estates in England ([14], II. i, p. 63; [2], pp. 27-9). Anselm arrived in Canterbury on 7 September 1092 and the next morning headed for a meeting with the king before making his way to Chester. At Chester he advised the earl on his plans to bring monks from Bec to the abbey of St Werburgh. At Christmas he stayed in London, probably with Gilbert Crispin the abbot of Westminster and another of the Bec alumni who formed a support network throughout the Anglo-Norman *regnum* ([1], pp. 23-48). Eadmer tells us that the monks at Canterbury had welcomed Anselm in September and acclaimed him as archbishop, 'as if foretelling the future'. When Anselm reached the royal court he was welcomed eagerly by all the nobility and William Rufus himself rose from his throne and met him at the threshold of his hall joyfully ([14], II. i, pp. 63-4).<sup>7</sup> Anselm spoke privately with the king and rebuked him for the things that were being reported about him, which 'by no means befitted the dignity of a king.' He then left for Chester ([14], II. i, p. 64). It was during Anselm's stay with Earl Hugh that King William was struck down with the illness mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

There has been considerable debate about Anselm's investiture as archbishop of Canterbury, but here the focus is on the motives of those who put him forward for the post, rather than on the sincerity of Anselm's refusal to accept the office (e.g. [9], pp. 186-94). The medieval sources suggest that Anselm was an obvious candidate to succeed Lanfranc as archbishop. He was well-known to the English Church hierarchy and had found followers among the secular aristocracy. Even the king showed him respect and tolerated his moral criticisms. For the English Church this was time of crisis, although whether Christianity itself was under threat is doubtful. In the moment of crisis the collective will of the secular and ecclesiastical communities of England was that Anselm should become archbishop of Canterbury, 'not a single voice was raised in objection' ([14], II. ii, p. 65). Anselm's authority as a leader was recognised and it was hoped that he, as a recognised charismatic leader, fortified with the added charisma of his monastic office and his reputation as a scholar, could lead the English Church out of its moment of crisis. In addition, Anselm's status as an 'adopted Norman' and his presumed command of the French language, as well as his relationship with the ducal and then royal house, would have ensured his acceptability to the Norman ruling class.<sup>8</sup> Anselm was, as Eadmer noted, 'the man most fitted for the work' ([14], II. ii, p. 64). There were, however, dissenting voices and those belonged to the monks of Bec, who feared the loss of their charismatic leader. The monks of Bec had a prior emotional and institutional claim on their abbot and Anselm recognised the distress his departure caused. But despite their protests, Anselm submitted to the will of God, as he wrote in one of his letters, and accepted his elevation to Canterbury ([4], II, No. 156, pp. 28-36).

This analysis of the early part of Anselm's career has attempted to make use of Weber's model of charismatic authority. Anselm's charisma operated on many levels and together these various manifestations of charismatic authority combined to make him one of the most influential figures of his day. However, his position as archbishop of Canterbury proved precarious and before the end of

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<sup>7</sup> Vita, II.i, pp. 63-4

<sup>8</sup> My thanks to Gary Dickson (personal communication) for this point.



1097 he was forced into exile ([14], II. xxii, p. 98; [2], pp. 87-8). As his relationship with William Rufus deteriorated, Anselm increasingly faced opposition from those who had seen in him a chance to restore the fortunes of the English Church. With each setback, the power of Anselm's charismatic authority, with the exception of his scholarly reputation, dwindled. The spell had been broken and there seems to have been no popular outcry at his treatment at the hands of the king and his officers. Anselm fled the kingdom abandoning the English Church. His charismatic authority could not withstand the pressure applied by the king, an individual who also combined the charisma of office with personal charisma to expose and exploit the instability of his archbishop's pretensions to leadership. But the crucial blow to Anselm's position was delivered by his followers in England, who simply lost faith in his charismatic authority. For Anselm it was a relief: 'being now out of England, [Anselm] rejoiced exceedingly and gave thanks repeatedly to God because he saw that he had escaped as from the great furnace of Babylon, and had attained a sort of peak of calmness and rest' ([14], II. xxiv, p. 100). The failure of Anselm's charismata to prevent the deterioration of his relationship with the king of England highlights the precarious nature of this type of authority. Resting as it does as much in the perceptions of the followers of charismatic figures and their continued faith in their leader, as on the actions of the object of their devotion, this manifestation of authority is prone to sudden and devastating dissipation.

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